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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **GOVERNOR SCHWEITZER TO CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY IN CHOTEAU**

**Choteau, Mont.** — Governor Brian Schweitzer will be celebrating Arbor Day on Friday, April 29<sup>th</sup> by planting a tree on the Choteau Elementary School grounds. The Governor will be joined by the students of Choteau Elementary for the 2005 Arbor Day Celebration scheduled to begin at 1:10 p.m.

Montana State Forester, Bob Harrington, Choteau Mayor Dan Clark and DNRC Director Mary Sexton will also be on hand to speak about the history of Arbor Day and the importance of trees to the citizens and the state of Montana.

Kelley Gundale, DNRC Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator and organizer of the Arbor Day celebration stated, "We are excited to have the Governor participating in this year's ceremony to celebrate Arbor Day," Gundale explained. "In addition to planting a tree, we'll also be presenting the City of Choteau with their first Tree City USA award. This should prove to be one of the best Arbor Day celebrations yet!" This year, the celebration is being held in Choteau due to the dedication and commitment by the community to work towards creating a sustainable community forestry program.

In Montana, Arbor Day was officially designated as the last Friday in April by the state legislature in 1989. The legislation states that Arbor Day is observed to "increase public awareness of the vital importance of conserving and propagating trees and forests to the everyday life of Montana citizens." Arbor Day is the only official proclamation declared annually by the Governor.

The idea for Arbor Day originally came from a resident of Nebraska. Julius Sterling Morton, one of Nebraska's early pioneers, promoted the need for tree planting across the state's treeless plains. The first Arbor Day was observed in 1872, and it is estimated that more than a million trees were planted on that day. Two years later, in 1875, Nebraska's governor declared the first official Arbor Day and the idea of the tree-planting holiday caught on across America. Today, there are Arbor Day observances in every state and in many countries around the world.

In Montana, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Urban and Community Forestry Program, is the main proponent of Arbor Day and Tree City USA activities state-wide. The Urban and Community Forestry Program, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, is administered through the State Forester's Office of the DNRC. Its staff includes a state coordinator and two field foresters located throughout Montana to offer technical, financial, and volunteer assistance to cities and towns statewide.

**##DNRC##**

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